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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 003763

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/17/2015

TAGS: PREL PGOV KPAO KISL EG

SUBJECT: POST CONTINUES TO ENGAGE KEY EGYPTIAN FIGURES ON KORAN DESECRATION STORY; EGYPTIAN REACTION MUTED

REF: A. STATE 90992 (NOTAL)

¶B. CAIRO 3647

¶C. STATE 88240 (NOTAL)

Classified by Charge Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Embassy Cairo has engaged key contacts vigorously in response to initial allegations of Koran desecration at U.S. detention facilities in Guantanamo and Newsweek's subsequent retraction. During a May 12 meeting with Prime Minister Nazif, the Charge drew from ref C talking points to emphasize that the U.S. condemns any form of desecration of the Koran. Poloff delivered the same message to the MFA Cabinet staff member responsible for Arab affairs, Alaa Hadidi, the same day. Also on May 12, the Embassy posted Ambassador Boucher's and Secretary Rice's statements on our unclassified website and contacted key press contacts and media outlets to make sure they took note of these statements.

¶2. (SBU) After Newsweek admitted that its story was erroneous, poloff highlighted the retraction in a May 16 meeting with the Arab League Chief of Staff. We prominently posted on our website May 17 the White House report (of May 16) on Newsweek's retraction and disseminated the news to key press contacts via press release and e-mail. On May 17 Post also shared the retraction with the Ministry of Defense and the foreign military attache community. Post is in the process of informing the leaders of Egypt's key Islamic institutions of the retraction, including the Sheikh of Al Azhar, the Grand Mufti, and the Ministry of Religious Endowments, and anticipates reaching these individuals or key staff members by COB May 17.

¶3. (SBU) The official reaction to the allegations in Egypt has been one of general condemnation of disrespect for the Koran rather than over-reaction to the allegations themselves. The GOE, which is facing increasing pressure from domestic opposition groups, particularly from Islamic quarters, has no interest in fanning the flames of this story. To date there have been no significant public demonstrations and expressions of anger, thanks in part to the GOE's interest in avoiding them.

¶4. (SBU) Post will continue to engage with key contacts in Egypt to ensure that coverage of Newsweek's retraction and USG statements condemning desecration of the Koran receive as much attention and media play as possible. Senior USG officials in Washington may wish to consider raising the retraction with Prime Minister Nazif during the course of his visit.

Visit Embassy Cairo's Classified Website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/cairo>

You can also access this site through the State Department's Classified SIPRNET website.

GRAY